

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC
CINCUER

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 5954

CINCPAC AND CINCEUR FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: POLITICS IN PAKISTAN: IS A CLEVER HAND BEING PLAYED?

REF: ISLAMABAD 5208 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) HAS PUT NEW
VIGOR INTO ITS CAMPAIGN TO BROADEN ITS BASE OF SUPPORT BY
INTRODUCING POLITICIANS INTO PAKISTAN'S GOVERNANCE. INVOLVED HAVE
BEEN BOTH CARROT AND STICK, AND THE RESULT OF A WEEK OF HECTIC
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ACTIVITY HAS BEEN TO PRODUCE WHAT APPEARS TO BE UNBEARABLE
PRESSURE ON THE RECALCITRANT LEADERS OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL
ALLIANCE (PNA) TO BE MORE AMENABLE TO A DEAL. AT WEEK'S END, THE
MLA APPEARED TO HAVE TURNED THE PNA AROUND; PROSPECTS NOW LOOK
MORE PROMISING THAN A MONTH AGO FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT TO BE
FORMED, BUT MANY TOUGH HURDLES STILL REMAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER AN OBLIQUE, IF NOT ARCANE, BEGINNING, POLITICS IN PAKISTAN TOOK A VIGOROUS TURN LAST WEEK, LARGELY THE RESULT OF MLA PRESSURE ON THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) TO RECONSIDER THEIR RECALCITRANT POSITION ON JOINING THE GOVERNMENT.

3. THE WEEK STARTED WITH AN OBVIOUSLY INSPIRED LEAD IN THE USUALLY TIMID GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PAKISTAN TIMES, WHICH CLAIMED THAT THE MLA WAS ABOUT:

-- TO ANNOUNCE A FIRM DATE FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS;

-- TO ESTABLISH A "HIGH POWERED COMMISSION" TO OVERSEE THE WORKINGS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES;

-- TO APPOINT MORE CIVILIANS, "PREFERABLY POLITICIANS WITH NO PARTY AFFILIATIONS" TO THE GOVERNMENT; AND,

-- TO ALTER THE 1973 CONSTITUTION TO DECREASE THE POWER OF THE PRIMIN.

4. THE STORY SET OFF A WAVE OF RUMORS AND HECTIC POLITICAL ACTIVITY (MARTIAL LAW REGULATIONS NOTWITHSTANDING) AS SPECULATION AROSE THAT THE MLA WAS CONSIDERING A BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES OR AT LEAST A SHARP REDUCTION IN THEIR NUMBER. CORRECTLY ASSUMING THEMSELVES TO BE THE TARGET OF THESE THREATS, THE LEADERS OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PNA HUDDLED AMONG THEMSELVES AND RAN TO MEET ANEW WITH THE CMLA, GENERAL ZIA, AND HIS COLLEAGUES IN RAWALPINDI.

5. IN WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN A RELATED BIT OF MLA MUSCLE-FLEXING, FORMER PRESIDENT OF AZAD KASHMIR, ABDUL QAYYUM KHAN -- WHO HAD HIMSELF DONE YEOMAN SERVICE IN PROMOTING THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CONCEPT -- WAS BANNED FROM FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY EVEN BEFORE THE DISQUALIFICATION TRIBUNAL NOW HEARING HIS CASE COMPLETES ITS ACTIONS. THIS IS THE FIRST PNA LEADER TO BE A TARGET OF THE MLA'S ON-GOING ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS, AND WHILE IT MAY BE JUSTIFIED SOLELY ON QAYYUM KHAN'S RECORD IN OFFICE, THE EFFECT WAS TO PUT THE OTHER PNA LEADERS ON NOTICE WITH REGARD TO POSSIBLE ACTIONS THE MLA COULD CONTEMPLATE AGAINST THEM, ON THE BASIS OF EXISTING CHARGES STILL ON THE BOOKS.

6. PLAYING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET, THE MLA APPEARS ALSO TO HAVE LOOSENED THE LEASH OF PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) LEADER MAULANA KAUSAR NIAZI TO ENABLE HIM, WITH SOME FANFARE, TO ANNOUNCE THE NAMING OF FIFTY NEW MEMBERS OF HIS PPP FACTION'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE. IN THE PROCESS, THE MAULANA DUSTED UP MEMORIES OF THE MISDEEDS OF ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO AND HIMSELF CALLED FOR EARLY ELECTIONS -- ALL WITH LITTLE OR NO CONCERN FOR THE MLA'S

CONTINUING BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THIS TYPE. NIAZI WAS SCHEDULED FOR AN "IMPORTANT" MEETING WITH ELECTION ADVISOR LGEN CHISHTI ON JUNE 18TH, AND ONE WITH THE CMLA SOON AFTER.

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7. MEANWHILE, PNA PRESIDENT MUFTI MAHMOOD'S JUNE 14 MEETING WITH THE CMLA PRODUCED ONE OF THE STRONGEST STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE MLA BY A POLITICIAN SINCE THE ARMY TAKEOVER LAST JULY. MUFTI SAID THAT IF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS NOT EXTENDED COOPERATION, "THE ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TOO HORRIBLE TO EVEN THINK OF." HE WENT ON TO COMMENT THAT THERE HAD BEEN SOME PROGRESS IN PNA-MLA COOPERATION, BUT THAT, "THE DECISIVE STAGE HAD NOT YET BEEN REACHED." THE PAK TIMES PLAYED THE STORY EVEN MORE STRONGLY THAN MUFTI'S STATEMENT MIGHT HAVE ALLOWED AND LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT MUFTI WAS SQUARELY IN ZIA'S POCKET. PNA LEADERS MET AGAIN AMONG THEMSELVES ON JUNE 15 AND 16 -- SIGNIFICANTLY WITH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP), WHICH HAS
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OPPOSED THE PNA LEADERSHIP ON THE QUESTION OF JOINING IN THE KIND OF GOVERNMENT PROPOSED BY THE MLA.

8. THE NDP, IN FACT, APPEARS UNSURE OF EXACTLY HOW TO PLAY THE MLA'S NOW VIGOROUS PURSUIT OF POLITICAL GOVERNMENT. NDP SPOKESMAN ZUBERI INQUIRED OF POLCOUNS OVER THE WEEKEND IF THE WORLD BANK CONSORTIUM HAD IMPOSED SOME UNSTATED REQUIREMENT ON THE GOP TO PUT TOGETHER A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. WHEN TOLD 'NO,' HE SAID HE COULD NOT OTHERWISE UNDERSTAND THE MLA'S REVIVED DRIVE TO INCORPORATE POLITICAL ELEMENTS INTO PAKISTAN'S GOVERNANCE. ZUBERI NOTED THAT HE HAD NOT EXPECTED THE MLA TO COME BACK SO QUICKLY AFTER THE PNA'S LAST LETTER -- WHICH HAD BEEN FAIRLY NEGATIVE ON THE SUBJECT OF PARTICIPATION AND WHICH REMINDED THE GENERAL OF THE NEED TO LIFT BHUTTO-ERA CHARGES AGAINST PNA LEADERS. ZIA CONTINUES TO TALK ABOUT THE NEED TO SAVE THE ARMY BY GETTING IT OUT OF POLITICS, BUT -- ACCORDING TO ZUBERI -- HE WAS UNWILLING IN THE LAST ROUND OF TALKS TO MEET THE PNA'S DEMAND FOR REAL POWER. IN ANY EVENT, ZUBERI NOTED THAT THE NDP'S POSITION REMAINS THE SAME; IT WILL NOT JOIN BUT WILL NOT OPPOSE.

9. LEADER OF THE TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL, ASGHAR KHAN, ALSO MET WITH THE CMLA JUNE 15. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE MEETING, ASGHAR SAID THAT ZIA HAD INVITED THE TEHRIK TO JOIN A NATIONAL OR CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT ALONG WITH THE PNA, BUT ASGHAR SAID HE DECLINED THE OFFER. ASGHAR REPORTEDLY TOLD THE CMLA THAT HE STILL HOLDS FIRM TO HIS DEMANDS FOR ELECTIONS IN SPRING 1979, AND A LIFTING OF THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY. ASGHAR, AT LEAST PUBLICLY, SEEMS DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT POSITION AGAINST MLA PRESSURE.

10. COMMENT: ACCEPTING THE CAVEAT THAT A COHERENT ANALYSIS OF THESE EVENTS ASSUMES THE EXISTENCE OF A VERY CLEVER HAND IN THE MLA PLAYING THE POLITICAL CARDS, A PATTERN DOES EMERGE FROM THE

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ACTIVITIES THIS PAST WEEK. AFTER RECEIVING WHAT WAS PURPORTEDLY A RATHER TESTY LETTER FROM PNA LEADERS ABOUT THEIR PRE-CONDITIONS BEFORE JOINING A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (REFTEL), THE MLA APPARENTLY DECIDED TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PNA TO FORCE IT INTO A MORE RECEPTIVE MOOD. THE PNA REMAINS INCAPABLE OF ELECTORAL VICTORY AND PROBABLY KNOWS IT WOULD BE THE REAL LOSER IN AN EARLY ELECTION. BY ITS APPARENT ACTIONS DURING THE WEEK, THE MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITIES REMINDED THE PNA LEADERSHIP THAT ONLY THE MLA CAN PROTECT THE PNA FROM BHUTTO (OR HIS GHOST), FROM AN ELECTION, OR EVEN FROM ITSELF.

11. HAVING ESTABLISHED THAT THE PNA CAN BE SCARED INTO A MORE SUBSERVIENT POSITION, THE CMLA NOW NEEDS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE IS PREPARED TO GIVE ENOUGH ON MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE PNA LEADERSHIP SO THAT THEY CAN DEMONSTRATE TO THEIR FOLLOWERS CONCLUSIVELY THE BENEFITS OF ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY IN SOME SORT OF PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MLA. SOME OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE PAK TIMES STORY WHICH KICKED OFF THE EVENTS OF THE WEEK CAN OBVIOUSLY BE PUT ASIDE, SUCH AS THE COMMISSION ON PARTIES, AND THE HINTS AT REDUCING THEIR NUMBER. INDUCEMENTS LIKE DROPPING ALL PENDING CHARGES AGAINST PNA LEADERS COULD ALSO BE THROWN IN THE HOPPER. BUT ZIA HAS YET TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE IS PREPARED TO SHARE POWER AS WELL AS RESPONSIBILITY, AND THAT QUESTION -- DESPITE LAST WEEK'S FRANTIC ACTIVITY AND MANY UPBEAT PUBLIC STATEMENTS -- REMAINS TO BE ANSWERED.
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